

‘You have to let go to hold on’: a rock climber’s reflective process through resonance

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Resonance is a process that empowers people to design their life in a way that allows them to feel the way they want to feel. In this holistic process, individuals identify how they want to feel, prepare to experience these feelings, recognize obstacles that prevent them, and reconnect with desired feelings when they are disengaged from the process. Reflection, a conscious and intentional exploration process leading to a better understanding of complex ideas, is an inherent constituent of resonance. It allows individuals to enhance their self-awareness, which they use to design their resonance process and life. This article illustrates an athlete’s reflective process and how it was fuelled by the facilitator of the resonance-based intervention in which he took part. It also outlines many realizations and the personal progress that resulted from the athlete’s experience with resonance.

Authorship

Jody Miall, the athlete who participated in this intervention, collaborated in the writing of the present paper. Our main motive for doing so is a firm belief, in line with that of Sparkes (2002), that participants can articulate as well as researchers their stories and emotions. As stated by Lincoln (1997), we also feel that participants should be able to choose how they are presented in research reports. So instead of having the main researcher use edited quotes to illustrate her interpretation of the participant’s voice, we chose to take account of both voices. We negotiated the way to present the text and the aspects of the intervention to discuss.

We recognize that in reality, negotiation between participants and researchers, concerning the writing process is unbalanced (Van Maanen, 1988); however, conscious efforts were made to give as much room to Jody as he wished to take. His voice and representation of his own experience through the intervention were highly

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respected. As raised by Lincoln (1997), we did not feel that it was quite right to take ownership of Jody's story and speak for him in this article.

We chose to use the first person pronouns 'I' and 'we' when possible in this text. 'I' is used to refer to the two participants in the intervention. Within the article, Jody's words are in bold whereas Isabelle's are italicized. 'We' is used when both are jointly commenting. Otherwise, we used our names and third person pronouns to simplify the understanding of the context and events. By using first person pronouns, we wished to bring a human side to this text. It was also a way for us to acknowledge that this article is our construction, not an objective presentation of facts as Tierney (1997) pointed out.

Context of the study

This paper reveals the experience of Jody, a 27-year-old rock climber, as he took part in a resonance-based intervention, which will be described in a subsequent section. Isabelle, a masters student in human kinetics, sport psychology, facilitated Jody's experience of resonance and reflections through the intervention. The main focus of this article is to illustrate how Jody engaged in frequent meaningful reflection to deepen his understanding of himself and what allowed him to feel the way he wished to feel, which led to his personal progress. It also demonstrates the interactions between the actors of the intervention and how Isabelle contributed to Jody's experience with resonance.

Jody was one of three participants taking part in a study conducted by Isabelle in the context of her masters degree. The three participants had highly different experiences with resonance and what was particular about Jody's was his readiness to fully engage in resonance and in deep sustained reflection as part of the process. We highly value such a positive experience with resonance as well as Jody's progress as a result of it and we wish to present it in the next pages. However, it is important to note that living resonance is demanding. It requires much work and effort through which Jody continually persisted.

Bussey (2002) made an important distinction between change and progress. While change concerns technical and material improvements, progress is spiritual, thought to be associated with 'the inner fabric of the human psyche' (p. 304), and implies an evolution of consciousness. The notion of spirituality in this article refers to the human search for meaning, inner peace, and harmony with one's environment (Gulick, 2004). As explained below, the use of resonance allows for an in-depth exploration of the human experience.

Resonance

The concept

Newburg and colleagues (2002) proposed the concept of resonance to help individuals achieve well-being and optimal performance. Resonance is a way of life based

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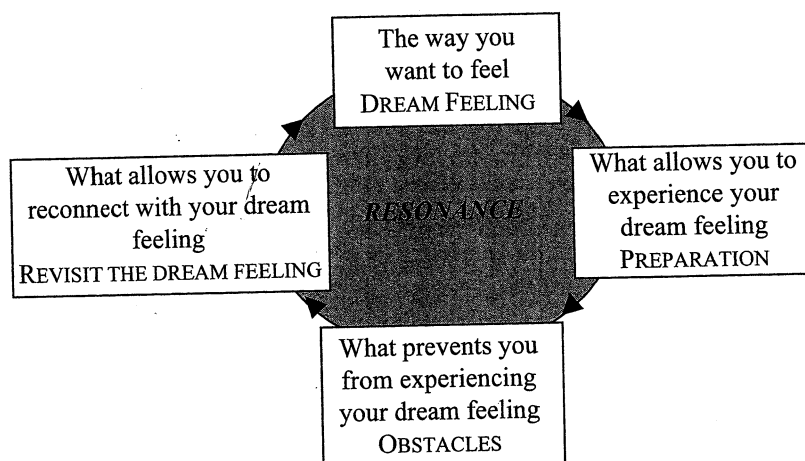


Figure 1. The resonance performance model (RPM; Newburg *et al.*, 2002)

on how a person wants to feel on a daily basis. In this process, the individual first needs to learn about how she wants her life to feel. She can then establish strategies to facilitate the occurrence of her desired feel. To engage in resonance, the person must also learn about what prevents her from feeling the way she wants to feel. This allows her to develop strategies to reconnect with her desired feel when she faces an obstacle. A simple model (Figure 1) was put forth to facilitate the understanding of the basics of resonance but the concept is in fact a deep, complex, and individualized process.

The notion of 'feel' is fundamental to the concept of resonance. Feelings are commonly conceptualized as the exclusive subjective experience of emotions (Vallerand & Blanchard, 2000). However, according to Damasio (1994), all emotions generate feelings although feelings do not necessarily originate through emotions. He explains that subtle feelings, like 'the feeling of life itself, [and] the sense of being' (p. 150) are normally present 'background' feelings that do not originate from emotion. Denzin (1984) described one type of feeling, 'self-feelings' as bodily felt sensations originating through self-reflection and intentional focus into the self and on one's connection to the world. The dream feeling in Newburg and colleagues' (2002) model emerges from continued introspection, intentionality, and/or spirituality and reflects the person as a whole. In this model, 'feel' is a subjective experience not limited to emotional states. It includes kinaesthetic sensations (i.e., feel strong, feel the rhythm) and cognitive impressions (i.e., feel confident, feel familiar with).

Reflection: an inherent constituent of resonance

Gelter (2003) defined reflection as 'a conscious, active process of focused and structured thinking which is distinct from free floating thoughts, as in general thinking or day-dreaming' (p. 338). For Boud and colleagues (1985), it is an

'active process of exploration and discovery which often leads to unexpected outcomes' (p. 7). Moon (2004) argues that we apply reflection to complex ideas to further our understanding of them. In regards to resonance, the object of a person's reflection is herself with the purpose to better understand who she is and what helps her expand herself out into the world in a harmonious and authentic manner (Newburg *et al.*, 2002).

Resonance is a holistic approach that seeks to explore the many facets of an individual's life: affective, cognitive, physical, spiritual, and social. In this approach, the focus is on the lived experiences of the person and what she feels is a foundation for exploration and reflection. Particularly, engaging in the process of resonance requires that the person develops self-awareness allowing her to understand how she wants her life to feel and what will allow her to feel this way. This self-awareness is necessarily achieved through reflection.

Furthermore, paying attention is much discussed and valued by Newburg (2006; Newburg *et al.*, 2002). To develop her personal resonance process, an individual must learn about her life, strengths, weaknesses, desires, beliefs, and also, her fears. Accessing this information allows her to elaborate a resonance model that truly fits with who she is in essence. In turn, her resonance process empowers her to be herself.

Knights (1985) suggested that 'reflection is most profound when it is done aloud with the aware attention of another person' (p. 85). Thinking aloud with the guidance of a listener and receiving another's complete attention with the confidence of being uninterrupted and fully accepted is a powerful experience. Such an opportunity is precisely what Isabelle intended to provide through the resonance-based intervention. In terms of guidance, Moon (2004) points out that mediation of learning is an act separate from learning itself. We believe the same applies to the reflective process. In this intervention, Isabelle guided Jody's reflection by asking him questions that led him to contemplate his life, sport, and resonance process. However, Jody took responsibility for his own progress and chose to engage in meaningful reflection about himself and his life. He is the one who did:

... the real work [which] is in the soul searching, the observations about ourselves, the abandonment of ingrained beliefs of our youth, the recognition that safety is an illusion, and the discovery of who we can be if we'll just do the work. (Newburg, 1998, p. 7)

Nevertheless, like Moon suggests, in her interactions with Jody, Isabelle made a conscious effort to remain in tune with his understanding of himself and resonance. She took this into consideration as she guided his reflections and facilitated his experience with resonance.

Participants in the intervention

To help better understand the context of the intervention, we wish to briefly present ourselves, explain who we are and our backgrounds, and convey the nature of our interactions.

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I'm 27 years old. I started climbing when I was 12. Millions of people have asked me why I started climbing. I have no idea. It just came to me one day that I wanted to climb, and it has shaped my entire life since then.

It seemed that participating in this study was a perfect, perfect opportunity for me. I've always realized that in climbing, the mental game is a number one thing and I've also known for a number of years that this was my weakest link. This study has been one of the most influential experiences for me. I think it's the first time in my life that I actively looked for something to help me. I knew it was something I needed to do for myself. I guess this is the start of me doing things for me as a person.

I have always been aware of resonance; the correlation between getting what you give. You live well and you climb well, and you climb well and you live well. That resonates and continues in an upward spiral. At the same time, if I focus on the negative, I can get caught in a downward spiral.

Jody's ability to organize and verbalize his thoughts and his honesty with me as he shared rich and deep life experiences amazed me. It quickly became apparent to me that he took the time to reflect on what he lived through, which probably helped him make sense of his experiences and express them. Jody also believed that mental and emotional skills play an important role in his life and was open to the concept of resonance.

Isabelle

I did my undergraduate studies in the School of Psychology at the University of Ottawa. I then entered the masters program in human kinetics, specializing in sport psychology, at the same university. I worked with Jody in the context of my masters thesis.

In preparation for this study, I developed and lived my own process of resonance, discussed with Dr Doug Newburg about resonance and how to help someone experience it, read his book, and developed reflective questions based on it to help research participants deepen their reflections. I also took additional courses on resonance as well as counseling skills and approaches and I improved my abilities by conducting a pilot study. Throughout the intervention, I had debriefing sessions with Dr Natalie Durand-Bush, my thesis supervisor, every second week. We discussed resonance and research and we talked through any question, concern, or new experience I was going through concerning the research and intervention processes. Natalie was also involved in writing this article and her input is found throughout the text.

In regards to my role as facilitator in this intervention, my philosophy concerning interviewing was highly inspired by the client-centered humanistic approach (Rogers, 1949, 1957). Rogers' counseling theory advocates the importance of appreciating the client's perspectives and experiences and of honouring his strengths. He believed each person is a responsible being and has the potential to create his own internal comfort with appropriate support (Kirschenbaum, 2004). I also adhered to Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) notion of positive psychology, which is in line with some of Rogers' ideas. This science of

positive subjective experience focuses on strengths and it values and promotes nurturing human potential. These viewpoints shaped my interactions with Jody.

Nature of our interactions

Working with Isabelle has been pretty amazing. I didn't really have any expectations coming into this study about how we would get along. It didn't really occur to me that this was a crucial dynamic. Looking back now, I don't think my experience in this research project would have gone near this well with someone who didn't have the approach that she had. I found her to be very open, very non-judgmental which is really important. I never once felt like I had to watch what I was saying.

She was also very good at working things out of me. I never felt that she was trying to lead me to certain conclusions. She was just letting me take her along and come to my own conclusions and helping guide me when I lost focus. She was good at helping me get out what I wanted to say without influencing it. She seems to have a good balance there.

I also trust Isabelle a lot. When I first met her, before we even did an interview, I realized I felt pretty comfortable around her. She is someone that I trust so it was very easy for me to open up to her. Another really important point is that I always felt in this study, that I was helping with it, not so much that I was just a subject.

I also felt very comfortable in my interactions with Jody. I believe this comfort with one another had a positive impact on our discussions and on the intervention itself. I felt confident in my abilities to ask meaningful questions to trigger reflection, I felt that my efforts were well received, that I was contributing to Jody's growth, and I very much enjoyed my work with him. In essence, I felt the way I wanted to feel in the interviewing process. I believe this allowed me to bring myself in the interviews and fully focus on what I was there to do.

I understood the worth and consequence of developing a positive and trusting relationship with a participant in this type of intervention. Paying attention and critically looking at one's own life and internal world maximizes the experience of resonance and concurrent learning opportunities (Newburg et al., 2002; Newburg, 2006). However, I realize that the reflection entailed by this process can be threatening if it requires addressing difficult issues (Ghaye, 2000). To support Jody in this process, it was crucial that my attitude and behaviour reflect my empathy and positive regard toward him and that I be myself in our interactions.

Facilitating reflection through resonance

Over a period of four months we, Jody and Isabelle, engaged in seven in-depth, semi-structured interviews in a consulting centre, each lasting between two to three hours. We also met for brief on-site interviews within two hours before and after three of Jody's competitive events. A post intervention interview also took place four weeks after the end of the intervention. In these meetings, meaningful yet casual discussion went on. We normally talked about how Jody felt and wanted to feel in his life and

sport, the setbacks and obstacles that prevented him from experiencing his dream feeling, and how he designed his life and daily activities to create or revisit the way he wanted to feel when he had been distanced from it. However, Jody and the topics he wished to address shaped our conversations. He shared the happenings of his athletic and everyday life, and the many realizations he was making. He brought to light his thoughts about resonance and his life in our meetings and through discussion, probing, and support, Isabelle was able to help him clarify, make sense of, and further his reflections.

In the course of the intervention, Jody read a book, *The most important lesson no one ever taught me*, written by Dr Doug Newburg (2006) on the theme of resonance. In our conversations, he often brought up the book and realizations he was making thanks to his readings. Jody also engaged in daily journaling during the intervention period. At the end of the day, he took a few minutes to reflect on what went on during the day and what he learned about himself, his life, or his sport as a result of any of his interactions, reading, or reflective thinking. This allowed him to monitor and deepen his experience of resonance and also to take time to draw important lessons from his everyday life. He occasionally reread the content of his journal to revisit the lessons previously learned or to keep reflecting on issues. Through both his discussions with Isabelle and his journaling, Jody actively and critically looked in himself to explore and understand his inner life.

Fruits of reflection and living resonance

In this section, we illustrate Jody's reflective process and how it fuelled his progress. Quotes from interview transcripts and in some cases, Jody's further reflections on them are presented. We chose to include quotes that would best represent Jody's experience through the intervention and allow the readers to understand his progress. We, Jody and Isabelle, both had an input on this choice. While reviewing the interview transcripts, Jody first indicated which words, quotes or moments in the intervention were the most meaningful in his experience. Isabelle, as an active actor in the intervention, chose among these the quotes that, from her point of view, best reflected the resonance and reflective processes. A first version of the article was written based on these extracts and the text evolved through discussion and negotiation.

Jody is a naturally reflective person and he daily gives himself innumerable opportunities to learn through observation, reading, discussions, and reflection.

Isabelle: You talk about analysing your climbs and your ways of thinking. I'm curious to know how much time you spend reflecting, analysing, assessing ...

Jody: Sometimes weeks. Things come up to me that have happened years ago. I still have these little epiphanies about why I did a certain way. Most of the drive back from the competition, six hours about, I thought about it. How the competition went, what I could've done, what were the things I was happy with, little things I could have improved on, how I felt, why I felt that way.

Participating in this study, however, helped him structure his thoughts and maximize his reflective opportunities. Three months into the intervention, he shared:

When you started asking me the right questions, I've realized that I had never truly looked in myself. I wasn't looking at the right aspects of my climbing to see why I was doing better or worst a lot of the time. ... I know a lot more what to look for. ... I'm truly learning and listening to my body and listening to my feelings.

In the four-month period during which we worked together, Jody has learned, with proper questioning and support, to direct his own reflection and ask himself the right questions. Intentional reflection has helped him learn about himself, climbing, and how to create his desired feel.

In our first meeting Jody addressed the idea of self-belief and will. As he talked about it, what he felt was so intense he had shivers.

Isabelle: Tell me what gives you goose bumps.

Jody: Oh, man! [pauses] It's the feeling of knowing you can do something but you haven't done it yet. Knowing that everything has to come together but you can make it come together. It's just self-belief, that's what it is. It's that feeling of self-belief that I love. [Describes the Elektrobank video clip from the Chemical Brothers]. That's what I look for in competition. Bringing it together despite what else is going along. When I first saw that video I started crying. It brought up so much in me.

Isabelle: What exactly does it bring up in you?

Jody: Again, that feeling of self-belief. That feeling of just digging deep and pulling out what you have. That will. It's will! That's what I lacked last year, just the will to push and the ability to get into that.

Will and self-belief were central in Jody's dream feeling. Through the resonance-based intervention he was able to clarify issues in his life, which allowed him to get back in touch with his will. At the same time, his discourse about will became more constructive and assured.

Jody: I kept going until I got it. And that was just pure will. There was nothing in me thinking down, everything was focused on getting to the top of the feature and standing on top of the boulder.

When reading his interview transcripts he underlined another meaningful passage from our third meeting in regards to creating his optimal feel.

Isabelle: When you say 'climbing light' can you connect with it?

Jody: Yes. The feel no effort, focused, physically and mentally strong. That's it. That's what it is. It's just, whenever things come together. It's like you shed 50 pounds of all the self-doubt and other crap, exterior stuff that you let in when you're not in that mode.

Jody's reflections helped him learn about the feelings of self-belief, effortless energy, focus, and strength, which were important enough to him to protect them and do whatever he had to in order to experience them as consistently as possible.

A central topic in Jody's experience with resonance concerned self-doubt. In the fourth interview he shared:

Jody: My breathing needs to be clear, I need to remove doubts and that. [Pauses.] You know what?! That's it! It is doubt more than anything. More than having to bring arousal levels up, more than being able to push harder. I need to have

that confidence going in. I need to figure out what to do when I look at a problem and I'm not sure what to do right away. That's what I need to figure out. Hang on. [Writes something down.]

Isabelle: So?

Jody: Well I didn't even know what the issue was. So now I at least know what I've been trying to address here. It's not that problems seem too hard. It's more that I start to doubt myself if I'm not sure of the actual sequence.

Reflecting on his words in the process of writing this article, Jody realized:

My self-doubt is my biggest obstacle. Working out my self-doubt has been and is a continuing process for me. I know now that no magic word will release me in an instant from years of doubt. Only taking the realizations I have had and applying them every day will help wear it down, not just in climbing, I'm talking about every aspect of my life.

Jody engaged in deep reflections on the matter regardless of the discomfort it represented. We also talked about the issue in many occasions. For instance in the seventh interview we discussed:

Isabelle: And what have you figured out about what allows you to climb your best?

Jody: One was the realization that I did climb with fear. That's something I need to work with, working out that self-doubt. In the beginning I didn't realize what it was I did to doubt myself or to limit myself, and now I have a much more concrete picture of what that is.

Isabelle: So you know what to address?

Jody: Yeah, more and more. And I know how to get myself in check faster and identify external things that can put me in that state and internal things that I allow to bring me into that negative state.

The intervention helped him learn much about himself and quite quickly, we observed progress in regards to his self-doubt. He gained awareness about its place in his life and learned to recognize when he doubted himself. Furthermore, he believed his realizations about self-doubt would allow him to climb his best. In regards to his resonance process, resolving issues of self-doubt was a way to prepare to feel the way he wanted to feel.

As the intervention proceeded Jody also learned about obstacles in his life. He recognized that some obstacles were external and that, although he could not control them, he could respond to his own internal emotional response to them and 'turn things around'. In the sixth interview, he said:

Jody: At this competition, I was flashing problem after problem. Everything else came up in the meantime, with [friend]. But that was separate from the comp, it was like two worlds. And I had to draw the line. If they intermingled I would've died in the finals. I mean I was really upset coming in. I was very concerned for [friend] but I knew I had to let go of that. And it happened like that. [Clapping fingers.] Pretty much walking in the door, I started shedding it.

Once he recognized the obstacle and committed to respond to it, it seemed to happen naturally. Reading this passage as he reviewed his interview transcripts, Jody reflected:

Jody: The experience I had at this competition, of taking control and letting myself go was another huge moment this year. I realized then I'd make some huge gains as a result of this study.

Jody learned a lot about 'letting go' of external and internal obstacles. Expectations, whether perceived or real, represented an important internal obstacle in Jody's life. For instance, in the first interview, Jody talked about meaningful climbs he had before the intervention. In particular, he recounted an uncommon experience, in which he had been able to let go of expectations.

Jody: Every thought or care I had of doing it went away. I just got on and climbed. It became the easiest thing ever. The hardest climbs I've done have taken almost no effort in that I was still pulling ridiculously hard but it didn't feel hard to me. It was as though I let myself get up the thing.

Isabelle: OK. I'm not sure if I heard well, but you stopped caring?

Jody: Stopped caring as in I just cared about the climb. I stopped caring about the end result.

Isabelle: And the expectations?

Jody: The expectation of getting it or not getting it was gone. I just wanted to climb. That's what I truly wanted. And then that's what happened.

Throughout the intervention Jody reflected about expectations as an obstacle in climbing and learned a lot about how he could respond to his initial reaction to it. Reflecting about the issue as he read the transcripts, he commented:

I hadn't realized the significance of letting myself get up problems. I learned that I had to accept the fact that I may not be successful. I had to let go of the expectation of doing well in order to be able to give myself to the climb. My expectations were what held me back, not any physical limitation. You have to let go to hold on.

Within his resonance model, letting go of expectations was an important strategy he used to prepare to feel the way he wants to feel and also to reconnect with his desired feel when he faces obstacles.

As illustrated in the quotes presented above, Jody engaged in extensive reflective efforts during the course of the resonance-based intervention. As a result, he reorganized his thoughts and beliefs about his climbing and general life, gained awareness regarding various issues in his life, reconnected with his will for climbing, and learned to let go of expectations and to create his desired feel more consistently.

Final comments

Participating in this study and learning about resonance has had a tremendous effect on my climbing life and overall life. My ability to create a more consistent dream feeling has been helping in every aspect of my life. I don't feel a perfect state of balance every second I exist, far from it. It's more that I feel in control and active in climbing and life in general. I know that I'm making gains in climbing and I can work harder without feeling drained. I'm happier and lighter. I have more to give to myself and to others.

In working with Isabelle and reading *The most important lesson no one ever taught me* (Newburg, 2006), I think I have come to realize a lot of

patterns in myself and also more importantly, I became familiar with some tools to deal with things as they come up such as self-doubt or competing when things don't go my way. It has given me a new perspective; I don't have bad days anymore, I just have hard days. I was coming into that a little bit on my own before the study but it accelerated things exponentially. When I've had hard times, it helped me bounce back and really heal and grow from it as opposed to just covering things up. I think in my everyday life I'm able to keep better perspective on things and be a lot more true to myself.

This intervention has been great for me as a student researcher and person. I enjoyed every bit of the process and learned tremendously through it. Jody's honesty, openness, and eloquence in articulating what he was experiencing has allowed me to comprehend what he was going through, and how resonance and reflection occurred in his life. Through our interactions, I made a conscious effort to understand where he was at in his reflections and always tried to further his process gauging on his apparent readiness. I trust that my beliefs and attitude rooted on the humanistic approach helped me be more in tune with Jody's experience.

Jody's personal characteristics allowed him to have such a great experience with resonance. He was receptive to new ideas and questions I was presenting him. He purposefully and consciously invested in all activities involved in this intervention—discussion, readings, journaling, and intentional reflection—regardless of the threat or discomfort they represented. Furthermore, he had a great desire to progress and was committed to doing the work entailed by living resonance. I believe this was key in his intervention. Nonetheless, it is in line with Newburg's (2006) viewpoint as he declares, 'The question is not really what you want. The question is what will you work for?' (p. 13).

Concluding remarks

This paper depicted the experience of Jody, as he engaged in a resonance-based intervention. He willingly accepted to take on the work and reflection entailed by living resonance. Through this process, he learned how he wanted to feel in his athletic and daily life, what strategies would facilitate this, the obstacles that could disrupt it, and ways to revisit his desired feel when he was distanced from it. In the course of the intervention, a positive and trusting rapport developed between Jody and Isabelle, who facilitated the intervention. This positive relationship proved to be a significant element of success for the study. Jody's interactions with Isabelle helped him learn to ask himself the right questions and therefore to engage in more meaningful and effective reflection. As a result he enjoys considerable progress generated in the consciousness or the human psyche (Bussey, 2002).

Notes on contributors

Isabelle Arcand is a Ph.D. candidate in Education with concentration in psychopedagogy at the University of Ottawa. She completed a Master's of Arts in Human Kinetics specialized in sport psychology after obtaining a Bachelor of Arts in

Psychology. Her Master's thesis focused on how individuals applied resonance to their life and how this influenced their experience of life and sport. Isabelle's research shed light on the role of reflection and ownership in the process of resonance. N.B. As this article was being written, Isabelle was in the process of completing her M.A.

Natalie Durand-Bush, Ph.D. is an assistant professor of sport psychology in the School of Human Kinetics at the University of Ottawa. Her areas of specialization include sport and life based counseling, resonance, feel and it's role in the development of optimal performance and well-being, and the development and maintenance of expertise in sport. She has been working for the past 10 years as a performance psychology specialist with hundreds of athletes. She is currently the Chair for the Canadian Mental Training Registry and is also a member of the managing council of the International Society of Sport Psychology.

Jody Miall is an elite rock climber who competes in regional, provincial, national, and international events. Devoted to the sport, he trains extensive hours, works as manager in a rock gym, is the leader of a climbing team, and offers support to young athletes in national and international events. Through his influence in the field, he contributes to establish rock climbing as a well perceived and recognized sport.

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